

## **Whitened geographies and education inequalities in southern Chile**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper we draw on critical geographies and sociologies of race and education to explore ways in which the meanings and conducts of whiteness are reproduced in and through Chilean secondary education in an indigenous-majority area. We focus on links between socio-economic, geographical and racial criteria to understand how the privileges of whiteness are naturalised in the region's educational provision and among Mapuche indigenous pupils. Although socio-economic inequalities are widely recognised to structure inequality between young people in Chile, we highlight the pervasiveness and unmarked nature of whiteness in the educational system in relation to the socio-spatial segregation of Mapuche pupils, secondary teachers' attitudes, and young peoples' self-positioning in the nation. These combine to marginalise and disempower Mapuche populations across the landscape of rural secondary schools in the Araucanía region of Chile.

Key words: whiteness, Mapuche indigenous populations, Chile, secondary pupils

### **Introduction**

Across a number of countries, scholars have interrogated the ways in which reforms to eradicate explicitly racist forms of education are undermined by the privileging of a normative whiteness inscribed within the national imaginary. 'Settler societies' premised on structurally and historically embedded forms of domination and white racisms of European-descent over indigenous populations are contexts in which these processes are especially pronounced (Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis 1995; Razack 2002). In connection with these settings and education issues of ethnic diversity and equity, we focus on the case of southern Chile where rural secondary schools are stereotyped due to their rural locations and majority indigenous intake. In these contexts, whiteness is constructed in relational terms around questions of colonialism, cultural difference, and universal knowledge. The paper argues that the time- and place-specific privileges of whiteness need to be carefully unpacked, and the linkages between white dominance and the subordination of subjects, explored in relation to socio-spatial arrangements and geographical imaginations.

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Our analysis begins from questioning whiteness and exploring the implicit mechanisms (discursive and material) by which racial categories are ascribed (hereon referred to as racialization) upon indigenous places and young people, but left unmarked in regards to an imagined white majority, so as to naturalise inequalities and politicised social relations. This comprises a distinctive approach to Chile's educational inequalities, given the historic emphasis in analysis and student politics on class differentials (eg. Hsieh & Urquiola 2006) <sup>1</sup>. Outcomes of education as measured by test scores hint at the pervasive impact of racialized geographies on indigenous pupils, at national and regional levels. The lowest national test scores (SIMCE) at primary and secondary levels are in the most northern and southern regions of Chile where indigenous populations are most densely concentrated. Test differentials also correlate closely with region-specific inequalities, since Mapuche pupils in the Araucanía tend to end school with lower-than-regional average results in national tests (McEwan 2004). Explanations need to account for links between socio-economic, geographical and racial criteria, since the latter is not a fixed analytical category but rather is embedded in the power relations of context- and time-specific political relations, material interests and social conflicts (See Goldberg 1993). We demonstrate how whiteness – often masked by appeals to national belonging – remains an imposing, negating and structurally determinant form of segregation in contexts characterised by a Mapuche indigenous majority, an active indigenous movement and intellectual challenges to whitening erasures of racial identities and life-ways (see Richards 2013). In this context, whiteness and 'universal' forms of knowledge are strongly linked discursively and materially with a notion of Chilean modernity.

Whiteness analytically captures the ways in which ideologies of white dominance and superiority are reproduced across and through the public sphere, political discourses and social institutions so as to permeate everyday understandings and taken-for-granted forms of racism. Essed's (1991) insightful work, drawing on the writings of W.E.B Du Bois, notes the processes by which colonial models of race-making and cultural oppression are re-worked into more subtle ideologies of cultural inferiority and determinism. Through socialisation into a 'pure white orientation', Essed notes how minority groups, "willing or not, become familiar with dominant culture through constant exposure in everyday interactions, through the media, or through school textbooks... [to] learn how whites think about [minorities]" (1991, 194). Whiteness – like any racial category – is therefore a situated, constructed and shifting concept of power relations, but which crucially becomes the unstated and normative standard by

which ethnic minorities are measured and cultural difference (often read as inferiority) construed.

Whilst much of the literature on whiteness tends to focus on the US context, its application in Latin American literature is not uncommon. McIntyre, for example, notes that whiteness refers to the oppression and marginalization of people of 'Colour' in the United States (2002, 31). Given that colour lines and scales of whiteness are socially produced in relation to particular political histories, racial categories of white-indigenous also result in similar patterns of social hierarchy, wealth, privilege and status (Telles & Flores 2013). In Latin America racial hierarchies are established around white-European privilege constructed relationally against indigenous and Afro-descent populations. These racializations are often denied in dominant narratives of racial mixing (*mestizaje*), and further obscured by practices by which racial social markers are discarded in favour of whitened ones (Wade 2001).

Whiteness, contextualized in Chile's socio-political history, has been a central component of national belonging. From 1810, leading political and intellectual figures subscribed to a European model of modernization and state building as a country "without Indians" (Mitnick 2004). As in Argentina and Uruguay, Chile viewed itself un-problematically as the inheritor of a whitened European ideal, whilst indigenous presence, albeit less numerous than in highland Andean regions, was marginalized, excluded and, in some cases, eliminated. The everyday categories of 'Chilean' and 'Mapuche' continue this colonial legacy,<sup>2</sup> which implicitly positions cultural differences around a notion of whiteness, an association bolstered by the lack of a discourse around racial mixing (*mestizaje*) in the Chilean context. *Mestizaje* supports a whitened national ideal in important ways: a national (non)racial identity (modern, white and urban) has been constructed around a biological-culturalist imaginary which assumes the 'prominence' and superiority of white settlement assimilated and 'diluted' racial ancestry (backward, rural, indigenous) through inter-racial marriage resulting in an increasingly homogeneous whitened population (cf. Warren 2009).

Scholarship within the expansive literature on culturally responsive schooling (see Castagno and Brayboy 2008) and various branches of critical race theory (see Ladson-Billings 1997) make visible and challenge the racial constructions of whiteness affecting minority students' educational experiences and achievements. Scholars suggest the need to interrogate the 'culture of whiteness' in schools and its double hegemonic bind by which

racial difference is constructed as a scientific/natural category and marked as other in relation to whitened norms of neutrality, transparency and universality, assumed to be non-racial (McLaren 1995; Giroux 1997; McIntyre 2002). Posing as an unmarked or invisible category, whiteness thereby facilitates non-ethnic (and uncritical) explanations for enduring educational differentials, usually premised on 'culturalist' differences (Reay et al. 2007; Hollinsworth 2014). Moreover, multicultural and anti-racist initiatives can become complicit in reproducing a whitened and western epistemological standard (and dominant forms of pedagogy) against which indigenous and ethnic minority knowledges and methodologies are contrasted as marginal and inferior, without reference to unequal power relations.

Education contexts involving indigenous and minority populations in countries such as Australia and Canada, follow similar trajectories to the Chilean context. Structural shifts in education practice moved from colonial histories of racist segregated education to multicultural and anti-racist policies and programmes as part of broader neoliberal reforms. Contemporary studies in these settings suggest that the hegemonic and whitened normative value by which difference is ranked, and racism is made endemic, continue to operate in education, consigning minority groups to discriminatory experiences, neo-assimilationist interventions, and inequitable outcomes (see for example Carr 2008 on Canada; Hollinsworth 2014 on Australia). Moreover, education operates under a 'larger culture of whiteness', which rejects broader indigenous claims to self-determination, offering instead compensatory mechanisms for acknowledging cultural difference (Castagnio & Brayboy 2005). Pre-service teachers in these contexts, it has been shown, often adopt colour-blind attitudes in their teaching practices, overlooking power differentials that arise from the socio-political backgrounds of pupils, and whitened privilege within curriculum content and educational outcomes (Solomon et al. 2005; de Freitas & McAuley 2008 on Canada; Van Ingen & Halas 2006 on Australia; Picower 2009 on US).

Each of these contexts maps onto global tensions of struggles for democracy, social justice and self-determination among indigenous citizens, pitted against assimilatory and homogenising tendencies of national education programmes that reproduce postcolonial economic, political and cultural forms of imposition (Tikly 2001; May & Aikman 2003). This paper contributes to existing debates by emphasising that the terrain of whitened privilege is unevenly distributed within national and regional boundaries, marking out certain (educational) spaces as racially inferior. Although the whole landscape of Chilean education

(and broader society) may be racialized, particular places and spaces are more intensely experienced and marked as such (see Kobayashi & Peake 2000). Absent from many studies, therefore, is the unevenness and lack of uniformity in the ways whiteness ‘takes place’ within particular educational settings. Through an analysis of rural secondary schools, we discuss the ways a colonial politics of whitening seeks to fix Mapuche pupils into low achieving categories of Chileanness, disconnected from the historic significance of territories in which they are located. Attention to these dimensions helps parse the difference between ethnic minority experiences, and those of indigenous students in locations where group ties to an ancestral territory produce distinctive senses of place and belonging (Marker 2000). Starting from the premise that whiteness signals a higher cultural valuation, recent work documents both the geographical and scalar variability in which whiteness is constructed, experienced and institutionalized, and the ways in which universal categories and forms of knowledge are associated with whiteness (Bonnett 1999; Berg 2012).

### Research Methods

Part of a broader interdisciplinary project aimed at understanding young Mapuche attitudes towards national, civic and ethnic belonging, research was conducted during a one year period in this region between 2011 and 2012 at four secondary schools. Located in two adjacent *comunas* (provincial administrative division) with similar demographics of rural Mapuche majorities,<sup>3</sup> the schools have comparable intakes of Mapuche pupils making up approximately 70% of the school population in each of the four establishments. Qualitative methods of repeated focus groups, semi-structured face-to-face interviews, and observation of classroom and extra-curricular activities were carried out by one of the authors (non-Mapuche) and a (self-identified) Mapuche researcher, with teachers, school directors, Ministry of Education employees, and over 100 Mapuche pupils. School textbooks and educational policy documents were also analysed.

The research context was limited to spaces in which a multicultural programme (known in Chile as Intercultural Bilingual Education) had been initiated, and therefore cannot be considered representative of the entire Mapuche population. The intervention of this programme, in large part by top-down state initiatives, was received divergently by various Mapuche communities – each with different political standings – and resulted in internal disagreements about its assimilatory tendencies and subsequent educational value. Criticisms

of the education system are not therefore limited to racial criteria, but refer to multiple factors of postcolonial politics and state-indigenous conflict. The heterogeneity of these positionings are beyond the scope of this article<sup>4</sup> but we draw attention to one particular facet of this tension and its immediate impact on Mapuche youth; namely the ways education landscapes become racialized.

We begin by demonstrating how colonial legacies of whiteness link in to, and are maintained in Chilean education today via geographies of exclusion. Following this we demonstrate how imaginations of whitened geographies are maintained through the History syllabus and teacher-pupil interactions. Finally in the third section we consider how indigenous pupils articulate meanings of racial and national belonging in (relation to) the classroom, and how they judge the (in)appropriateness of the context-specific education that they receive as a means of challenging or conforming to existing power relations.

### **Whitened Geographies**

In this section we look at the connection between racial and socioeconomic inequalities and the ways they construct marginalising geographies in regional and educational spaces. All four case study schools are located in or around small towns in the Araucanía Region with high density indigenous populations, small-scale agricultural economies, limited commerce, and relatively poor public services. Three of the case study schools are among the region's fifty lowest performing in terms of university entrance exam scores (*Prueba de Selección Universitaria* [PSU]) (MINEDUC 2012).<sup>5</sup> Educational outcomes such as these are, at least in part, attributable to school geographies – in particular the racialization of rural spaces in relation to white, urban spaces, and due to the forms of racist discrimination experienced by Mapuche teenagers who attend these schools.

As in other parts of Latin America, the region's schools' rankings correspond to existing class and racial hierarchies, which map out in material forms and within a social imaginary so as to create underprivileged conditions for Mapuche pupils (cf. Martinez & de la Torre 2010 on Ecuador). The case study schools – like many rural secondary schools in the region – do not charge enrolment or tuition fees in an attempt to attract a greater number of pupil enrolments, especially from low-income families residing in the countryside. Since public funding is allocated according to pupil enrolments, schools which fail to compete in the

market-based system become financially unviable. Unlike for-profit private voucher schools, which account for one third of enrolments in Chilean education and target more advantaged pupils, non-profit private voucher schools (constituting 16% of enrolments nationally) target low-income and indigenous students (Elacqua 2009). One of the consequences of offering free enrolment is that extra finances for school resources cannot be sourced from parental contributions, resulting in poor infrastructure. As geographically isolated, low status schools with poor educational outcomes, pupils learn to accept both substandard conditions and lowered expectations as legitimately fixed or natural.

Many of these schools have technical vocational training and have among the poorest educational achievement records in the region. Under a strongly ‘race-blind’ neoliberal model, vocational education reflects Chile’s pragmatic approach to its human capital requirements to bolster open markets, effective state spending and labour flexibilization. In the Araucanía, the purpose of these schools is to provide pupils with skill sets for (mostly) unskilled occupations, rather than preparation for higher education (Farias & Carrasco 2012).<sup>6</sup> In one Araucanía school, only fifteen of 66 pupils completing secondary school in 2009 took the PSU, and of those 15, only one-fifth scored a total required to enter university. In this way, ethnically-differentiated achievement outcomes in Araucanía schools are perpetuated and legitimated without challenging either the school choice system or whitened forms of education.

Such semi-rural and rural schools form part of a broader social and cultural colonial legacy of exclusion. In Chile, the national, whitened urban and progressive/modern binary is further substantiated by its antonym: indigenous, rural and backward. The location of particular schools therefore leads to racial readings; that is, regardless of pupils’ ethnic identity, they become analogous with the racialized categories attributed to those spaces. The production of relationally-defined geographies comes to designate not only who is non-white (and in consequence those who are excluded from favourable educational outcomes), but also who and where one is white and included. In discussions, the secondary Mapuche pupils suggested that attending schools that were linked to indigenous spaces in public discourse, made them subject to derogatory ethnic and class labelling from pupils at other schools in nearby towns:

Pupil 1: They see this school as just being for Mapuche. [As] a Mapuche school in the countryside which, in other words, means it is a lesser school.

3: [Pupils from other schools] see us like that because they go to \_\_\_\_ school, so they look down on us, all cool. They ask ‘where do you study?’, then say ‘we trample all over you’ [meaning ‘we’re so much better than you’]

1: They have always thought of us as being the least/ worst (*los menores*) and the poorest. (Focus Group (FG)1, male 19 and female 16)

As this quote suggests, the schools in peri-urban (non-provincial capital) spaces with high Mapuche intakes are systematically and popularly associated with existing socioeconomic and racialized inequalities in educational achievements, pupil intake and hierarchies of value. Although two of the case study schools had a nominally active multicultural programme, it is these schools’ reputation as being exclusively for Mapuche pupils that defines their position in socio-cultural hierarchies of value. Whilst it is difficult to separate disparaging comments from educational outcomes, schools’ negative reputation are primarily associated with a racialized, non-white, status. This is articulated in the quote below, acknowledging the school’s place within existing racialized hierarchies:

My uncle said ‘you’ll turn into a shaman, you’ll become a *machi* [healer] if you go to study in that school, because they’ll teach you how to do all that Mapuche stuff. You’ll become like those old Mapuche’. (FG9, male, 15)

This quote and others refer to being Mapuche in relation obscure, ethnic knowledges which are coded as distinctive to, and less relevant than, western scientific whitened knowledge. Association with the former types of knowledge are couched in terms that suggest it prevents Mapuche youth from achieving social value. Added to their distance from urban, ‘modern’ spaces, such associations with obscure knowledge elicit derogatory comments. The relational constructions of value and knowledge at play in the region confirm the rural spaces and their associated Mapuche-majority secondary schools as pre-modern and antiquated.

That Mapuche non-whiteness is associated with un-modern features and practices is reinforced by the schools’ physical environment and infrastructure. All four schools were clearly unable to maintain classrooms, public areas and dormitories at a standard found in urban, private and public schools, reflecting the lack of extra parental contributions.



Additionally however, school infrastructure associated with indigenous cultural identity also came, in one school, to be associated with a ruined and decrepit culture whose contemporary relevance was unclear. Although in the 1990s, this school had introduced multicultural education, today it has the aged and worn remnants of this past. Large faded murals, emblems incorporating Mapuche symbols, and classroom signs in *Mapuzungun* (the local language) convey symbolically an outdated nod to cultural diversity and other knowledges. Moreover during our fieldwork the school began to erase these meaning-laden cultural references, dismantling a *ruka* (traditional house) and removing the *kultrun* (shaman's drum) from the new school emblem, which was proudly displayed on recently-purchased school vehicles. As many pupils and teachers are aware, such emblems and murals never appear in urban middle-class schools, thereby re-enforcing the relational contrasts between these spaces and racialized social landscapes and shaping Mapuche pupils' learning about difference. Pupils' responses were mixed. Whereas some were critical about insufficient discussion of what the 'Mapuche' symbols represented, the majority took them for granted and barely commented on them after starting school:

6: The first time I arrived here at the school I took notice of it all [the Mapuche visual markers], but then like, we are where we are and...

2: You start to get used to it (FG4, female, 16 & female, 15)

Other pupils suggested the materials dated from a time when the school was exclusively for Mapuche-speaking pupils:

- It's just that before there were only indigenous kids. That's where it all started I think.  
(FG15, female, 16 & female, 17)

Pupils' comments demonstrate the power of physical environment to legitimate ethnic exclusion, relegating cultural difference outside Chilean whitened norms to an issue of the past, and making its gradual erasure normatively acceptable. These racialized meanings are thus 'written' into the school landscape (Van Ingen & Halas 2006, 392) and are read in ways which estrange indigenous youth from their own past and present. Pupils interpret the school's changing demographics and local geographies from a period when it was appropriate for a non-Chilean intake, in relation to the present when a mixed Chilean-Mapuche

population expects to be broadly within the terms of Chilean identity. Pupils see themselves as receiving a schooling that provides them with treatment associated with a (non-indigenous) Chilean and a 'racially undifferentiated society' (Moreno Figueroa 2010:391).

Despite their aspiration to equal treatment in a race-blind society, the ways in which pupils are categorised within the school works to reinforce the devaluation of Mapuche identity and racializes it in relation to a whitened norm, particularly in relation to family behaviour. Among the numerous official administrative frameworks utilized in the Chilean education system is the index of 'high vulnerability' (*Indice de vulnerabilidad escolar* or IVE-SINAE in its official acronym), a measure that collates a series of social characteristics identified as social problems. The index hence provides a numerical measure referring to the population where pupils originate, of issues such as alcoholism, intra-familial violence, delinquency, and unauthorised school absences.<sup>7</sup> For the 2013/14 school year, 2475 secondary establishments were identified nationally as having pupils from vulnerable backgrounds, of which 164 are located in the Araucanía. However, of the 85 schools with 95% or over defined as vulnerable, no less than 37 are located in the Araucanía,<sup>8</sup> and 30 of those are located outside the larger urban centres of Temuco and Angol (JUNAEB 2013).

The concentration of high IVE-SINAE measures in rural schools with large Mapuche intakes suggests that these technical devices are not neutral but, in the regional context, are strongly linked to racializing discourses that reinforce discursive links between rurality, low achievement and racial difference.<sup>9</sup> As anthropologist Tania Li (2000) suggests, technical measures frame indigenous populations as problems which trigger state interventions to deal with developmental deficits. In the Araucanía schools, teachers' discussions about the IVE and about pupils, their family, and origin community suggests that the IVE may represent a technical device for the central state, but that it has acquired racializing meanings in the schools themselves. Such racialized discourses de-politicise segregation while confirming the unmarked nature of white privilege. The case study schools were representative of the Araucanía, with vulnerability indices of between 96 and 98%. Echoing widely-held views about the reasons for low expectation among teachers and pupil failures, one head teacher commented that Mapuche pupils were not 'naturally' given to educational success on account of their home environments:

What one can observe is that the Mapuche child comes somewhat badly influenced by their family – they don't like to study much, they like to work, to watch television, and

now computers, ...although there is also a percentage of good students. (Interview 48, non-Mapuche director, male)

As the quote above suggests, the rural Mapuche are constructed as inferior, deficient or a second-rate category to Chilean/non-indigenous, replicating national stereotyping which frames them as lazy, ignorant, primitive, drunken or violent (Oteíza & Merino 2012). It is hence important to examine how ostensibly neutral measures such as the IVE-SINAE undergird and inform racial stereotyping in the regional context. The racial discourses that become linked to IVE measures tend to legitimise hierarchies of education outcomes and are linked to geographically-specific racisms.

In this way, imagined geographies of failure are projected onto rural and Mapuche-inhabited areas around the schools. Mapuche pupils – to a greater extent than non-Mapuche pupils – are imaginatively associated with these geographies of risk. Rural areas become linked to histories of manual labour (implicitly contrasted with urban professional and office-based employment), and as areas where academic achievement studying is difficult. Such hegemonic discourses work to normalise existing racialized patterns of schooling, instead of generating critical accounts of coloniality or innovative intercultural curricula. Pupils' educational achievement is naturalized, associated with socio-psychic dispositions that place the blame for poor outcomes on individual students rather than wider socioeconomic processes.

In this section, we indicated a number of ways in which overlapping racial geographical and class meanings are constructed in spaces of rural Chilean secondary schools. Spatial segregation connected to the quasi-market school choice system in Chile and a concentration of low-achieving vocational schools in rural areas cannot be understood outside the context of ongoing racial discourses and power associations that normalise and reproduce Mapuche disadvantage from the white privilege of education outputs in urban private sector schools.

### **Educational imaginings of whiteness**

As this section discusses, schools not only marginalise Mapuche pupils through socio-spatial segregation, but operate as sites in which normative values of whiteness are actively reproduced, in ways that marginalize and devalue indigenous subjects and knowledges.

Although indigenous peoples are mentioned in Chile's official national textbooks, the ways in which their presence is described, together with implicit constructions of knowledge and difference combine to produce representations of Mapuche as marginal and less legitimate subjects in the landscapes of Southern Chile, especially in comparison with the republic nation-state, constructed around non-indigenous identities and subjects. In the 1990s, the Chilean school curriculum removed explicitly racist representations of indigenous peoples in textbooks and pedagogic material (Crow 2006): in history and geography textbooks references to Mapuche, exclusively in the past tense, as 'primitive', assimilated and 'exterminated' were removed and replaced. Additionally, dominant narratives of Mapuche history that had formerly excluded the atrocities committed by the Chilean army when dispossessing the Mapuche of lands during the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'Pacification of the Araucanía' were replaced by more varied and balanced narratives. Our analysis of constructions of whiteness in Chile by contrast permits a closer critical reading of these textbooks that reveals the ongoing unmarked power of whiteness.

School histories of Mapuche participation in Chilean society cease to be mentioned in the *history, geography and social sciences* textbooks beyond 1883 – except as examples of distinctive cultural identities.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, the wider political and social relevance of Mapuche society extends only as far as their military defeat and displacement to official reservations. Such narratives discursively consign indigenous society to the past and the national periphery of the south or far north, whilst the remaining text focuses on a whitened, western European, and urban-centred Chilean nation. The textbook's narrative of an historic trajectory towards a white modernity is implicit within chapters on scientific progress, the sovereignty of Chile's national borders, the rise of liberalism, and economic growth. Such historical narratives are selective and systematically exclude successful action by Mapuche organisations during the early to mid twentieth century to enable indigenous political and social participation and the election of leaders to the national congress. Omissions such as these privilege static concepts of Chilean citizenship as premised on European whiteness and modernity.

Moreover, the textbook histories for 2<sup>nd</sup> year high school pupils deploy a geographical framing that founds an even deeper narrative about the inevitability of Mapuche territorial displacement and the establishment of a sovereign Chilean state. The 19<sup>th</sup> century 'pacification' is presented as a foregone conclusion, as illustrated by the first chapter's

heading 'Indigenous Societies in the Chilean Territory' (Goc 2012, *Historia, Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*, 2º Medio: 13; cf. Pinto 2000). Pupils are schooled to frame now-absent, historical Mapuche territories in relation to a lawful and authorised sovereign territory, defined not in terms of colonial conquest and displacement but by its self-definition as a modern nation-state that inhabits a neutral abstract space. Furthermore texts include no maps demonstrating ancestral territories that transcended the present Argentina-Chile border, creating the impression that nation-state borders are timeless, enduring and natural (Sparke 2005). Such geographical imaginations rely upon the active suppression of white presence in maps, in ways that bolster the taken-for-grantedness of white privilege while establishing European-white cartographic imaginations and territoriality (Radcliffe 2010). Textual representations of Mapuche areas prior to military conquest in 1882 furthermore frame them as spaces unmarked by race-ethnicity whose transfer occurred largely under routine legal and market procedures (on youth perceptions of land-territory, see Radcliffe & Webb 2014). According to the same second year textbook,

'The state bought numerous territories, which produced the displacement of the Mapuche towards the interior [of the country]. This process finally ended in 1881 with the so-called "Pacification of the Araucanía"' (ibid: 33).

The textbook goes on to say,

'The territories located between the Bio Bio and Malleco rivers were slowly incorporated via purchase, usurpation or occupation, causing the gradual displacement of the southern border as a consequence' (ibid:179).

The southern border is represented as un-peopled, a simple and neutral technology of statecraft, arising from an un-contentious process. Southern Chile is hence represented as an empty land, a geographical imagination that prompts and justifies settler colonialism (Razack 2002). As critical scholars increasingly document, southern Chile was settled by Chileans and Europeans who were granted land, ploughs and rifles by the republican state while other lands were sold at rock-bottom prices (Pinto 2000). Mapuche secondary pupils come to understand that indigenous populations during the late nineteenth century were not exploiting the land's market potential, and so were rightly displaced by more enterprising actors. Whiteness, from this perspective, is associated with economic productivity and state-sanctioned agency, notions constructed against indigenous presence. Pupils are hence interpolated as white settlers, or as rights activists, while the racialization of conquest, existing structures of rights, and education remain unmentioned (Razack 2002). Such

narratives de-legitimise indigenous struggles for territorial autonomy and prior consultation about large infrastructure and forestry projects. In response, Mapuche historians such as Marimán, Millalén and Caniuqueo (2006) propose that de-colonial Mapuche history should be taught in relation to indigenous conceptions of territory.

Teachers' attitudes consolidate the curriculum's normalisation of whiteness. According to research interviews, the majority consensus among teaching staff – Mapuche and non-indigenous alike – was that pupils themselves did not want to self-identify as Mapuche, having ascribed to national – white, western – cultural practices and attitudes:

- In the majority of schools that I've worked in during 17 years, many [pupils] feel ashamed of being Mapuche... very few know their origins (Interview 86, female non-Mapuche teacher)
- In my experience with the kids, the only thing that they'd like is not to be Mapuche, I'm talking about 95% of them (Interview 91, male, non-Mapuche teacher)

In this way, teachers' comments actively replicate textbooks' framing of 'authentic' Mapuche as belonging to the past.

Moreover, teachers' attitudes to the indigenous teenagers in relation to ability, and cultural difference reveal Othering practices through which the value of whiteness remains unquestioned. Teachers suggest that because the pupils express shame and rejection of an indigenous identity, they are justified in treating all pupils the same, which effectively means treating them as non-indigenous 'Chileans.' In some cases, moreover, non-Mapuche teachers saw it as their role to help the young people overcome 'cultural deficits':

- You must understand that the world is so small for them... they can't see beyond that [world]... (Interview 86, female)

As noted elsewhere, teachers are often inadequately prepared to teach in multi-ethnic settings (not least as curricula are often constructed in the image of dominant groups) leaving in place stereotypes about the abilities of indigenous learners (author reference). Teachers working in Araucanía schools likewise mentioned the difficulty of adapting national curricular content to

the regional context. The overriding sentiment among non-indigenous teachers is that Mapuche youth are culturally mal-adjusted to school environments and that a process of acculturation is required to improve educational outcomes. Through such narratives, teachers link academic potential with that which is not-indigenous, such that whiteness becomes naturalised as intellectual ability in ways that leave unquestioned the privilege of non-indigenous 'white' forms of knowledge in the curriculum and classroom. During interviews, teachers generally endorsed existing frameworks for teacher training, national curriculum planning and textbook content – signalling the importance of individual teacher's responsibility to modify pedagogies and thereby address pupils' shortcomings. Hence, teachers' (often unconscious) complicity, and compliance, with whitened forms of education perpetuate structural inequalities and ideologies of racial inferiority.

As the next section discusses, the privileges of whiteness give rise to the socio-racial segregation of Araucanía's educational landscape as well as classroom teaching practices and materials. In this context, pupils' narratives about school choice and the schools' approach to Mapuche ethno-cultural difference provide a window onto the reach and normalisation of the power of whiteness to shape pupil identities and outlook, even in Mapuche-majority rural districts and secondary schools. Despite their awareness of racism in Chilean society, the teenagers tend to accept white privilege as normal and inevitable.

### **Mapuche youths' perspectives on race and school environment**

-They [schools] are taking away the opportunity from many students to continue developing their culture within secondary education.... so even if they want to, they can't and that's why afterwards it [Mapuche culture] is being lost (FG16, female, 17).

Having traced the constructions of racial differentiation and the normalisation of whiteness in and across Araucanía's provincial secondary schools, we turn in this final section to analysing the ways in which racialization of Mapuche culture and identity, and the metonymic association of 'school choice' with whiteness. In this section pupils' responses provide key insights into how meanings of racial and national difference and belonging are constituted in relation to the geographies and histories of whiteness discussed above.

Such an analysis was prompted by Mapuche teenagers' expressions of satisfaction with the schools' teaching standards and their comfort in the classroom and schoolyard.<sup>11</sup> Exploring the young peoples' words closely revealed that pupils associated their current school with a process of choice (whether their own, or their parents) as a result of not "fitting in" at other schools, transport availability, or for a specific vocational curriculum. The discourse of choice in Chilean education reflects the institutional and ideological embeddedness of neoliberal reforms, and the emphasis on individualism. Despite the racialized geographies of segregation in Araucanía, and the resultant uneven quality of education available, no pupils mentioned exam results as a factor in their choices. Poor educational results were more often mentioned as a function of pupils' abilities, associating failure with indigenous subjects rather than educational institutions (e.g. interview 79, female, 18).<sup>12</sup>

Narratives among Araucanía school pupils regarding school choice are articulated in a public discourse around individual freedom to select educational providers, a discourse metonymically linked with whiteness as it is considered a distinctively Chilean achievement. Such discourses in public culture systematically overlook the entrenched inequalities of race, geography and family income which overlap to reproduce inequitable schooling access, experiences and outcomes (as discussed in Section I). According to Chilean research, indigenous pupils are more segregated than non-indigenous low-income peers across primary and secondary education, a pattern attributable in part to parental preferences for schools with student bodies that match families' social background (Elacqua 2009). Our findings in addition suggests that racialization actively constructs segregated educational systems in the Araucanía region, as teenagers perceive a marked difference between schools where they comprise a minority – where they are subject to extensive and routine racism – and the Mapuche-majority schools they attend. Being in a Mapuche majority is a better safeguard against discrimination:

-Here in the school they all respect me because I respect them... but outside [the school] I'm not respected because they [the public] are more racist. I lived on a road and everyone there was racist and called us countryside [derogatory term associated with rural poverty] and Indians. (Interview 68, male, 18)

-There's no need to discriminate here but it's different at other schools. Where I went [before] for example I was discriminated against because I was Mapuche and the rest



weren't... but here I feel welcomed (*acogida*) because we are all the same. (FG13, female, 18)

“Fitting in” hence acquires an additional meaning in light of the systematic racism expressed against rural indigenous pupils when they attend ‘whiter’ schools. By contrast in high Mapuche enrolments schools, the teens experience routine Mapuche majorities, replicable only in rural communities. Indigenous teenagers interpret the absence of (explicit) discrimination in the school not as racialized segregation of educational establishments (section I), but as a precarious achievement and as the route to an unmarked Chilean status (also, author reference). In schools where indigenous pupils are a minority, racial difference tends to be an isolating and marginalising experience since specific individuals are ignored in classroom spaces so as to privilege whiteness (cf. Martinez and de la Torre 2010). In the case study schools, by contrast, all pupils are nominally included and accepted as equals but premised on a normative whiteness, which appears to be the ‘solution’ to disadvantage.

According to the Mapuche teenagers, discrimination only occurs in contexts when individuals are singled out as racially different. Consequently, many pupils suggested rural, majority indigenous enrolment schools provide them with a setting in which they can blend in as ‘regular Chileans’. In these schools, pupils feel they are treated equally – based on colour-blind policies – while the knowledge taught there are legitimated and indeed perceived positively (cf. Van Ingen & Halas 2006; Lewis 2003). In the absence of favourable educational outcomes, pupils’ narratives demonstrate the tendency to locate alternative validations for school choices, but which reinforce existing geographical and racial segregation. The combined dynamics of racist violence and folkloric gestures towards Mapuche culture create a configuration of indigenous pupils, specific low-performing schools, and regional educational segregation that further combine to construct whiter choices as commonsense moves.

The white privilege of Chilean education strongly shaped the pupils’ reluctance and hesitancy to envisage Other forms of educational practice. However, the reproduction of unmarked whiteness was not always the case. When pressed, some teens discursively challenged racial exclusion within the education system.<sup>13</sup> One school, which provided extremely limited opportunities for cultural recognition, was criticised by a small number of Mapuche pupils:

-It's the Ministry who write the textbooks, they couldn't care less [about Mapuche

perspectives] and that's why they only put in the World War and stuff like that. (FG28, female, 19)

-They were supposed to teach Mapuche here. In the enrolments it said they taught Mapuche here (FG3, female, 14)

-In this school they don't value the Mapuche – they leave them aside (FG3, male, 16)

Young people had ideas about how to change the curriculum, suggesting they could envisage other forms of knowledge production. Among other suggestions, the teenagers suggested using *rukas* as alternate classroom spaces, extending Mapuzungun language lessons across all secondary education, learning Mapuche musical instruments, dances and sports, and involving community elders in teaching indigenous knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

In most cases, pupil agency was more ambivalent, as narrated by teens in another of the schools. They told of how a *rewe*, left abandoned on the school premises after the discontinuation of its IBE curriculum, was found by pupils who re-inserted it in the school playing area. Pupils were critical that it had been kept on the school grounds purely as decoration, not as the site for the production of Other knowledges to challenge the routine universal knowledge embedded in the national curriculum. Once implanted, however, the *rewe* was eventually turned into a goal post, not a use found in Mapuche communities. Although citing indigenous culture, objects such as the *rewe* are now used in ways that disavow Mapuche life-worlds and speak more to their destruction and the limits of white tolerance:

- It's just there to look pretty...they should put the *rewe* somewhere where it can be respected ... even though it's not used, it should be in a sacred place. But even we use it as a goal post and we kick it. (FG4, male 15)

Ann Stoler (2008) argues that the relics in postcolonial landscapes provide critical insights into colonial power. In coloniality's spaces of rural Araucanía schools, the *rewe* represents not a marker of valued cultural difference (although it does reflect histories of Mapuche activism in and beyond the education system), but a reminder of racialized subordinate difference linked to a peripheral, conquered and static past through a ruined present. Everyday landscapes of whiteness stand in contrast to sporadic and spatially limited practices

and monuments racialized as *other*, and not white, as only marginal to the nation and universal forms of knowledge.

Despite the *rewe*'s prominence in the schoolyard, its existence as a racialized adornment – having little practical use – reproduces the banality of whitened geographies under the sign of multiculturalism (also Thomas 2008). In addition to the institutionalised segregated geographies (Section I), the ruins of multicultural education firmly remind pupils that indigenous lifeworlds are associated with a conquered history, imaginable only in the terms set by white hegemony. The Chilean material highlights how creating meaningful spaces is particularly precarious for racialized youth subject to whitening educational processes. Whilst the *rewe* has significance in landscapes such as home communities, when transplanted to a school environment premised on the normalization of white spaces and identities, it represents a nostalgic concession to the non-white spaces and subjects of the past.

This section fore-grounded the difficulties Mapuche teenage youth encounter in imagining and articulating alternate geographies of belonging amidst whitening goals of Chilean education. Expressions of powerlessness and an inability to initiate change; and a prevailing sense of the declining importance and relevance of the Mapuche act to restrict the parameters for youth resistance. The young people's imagined geographies of belonging are infused with meanings of difference which prohibit their participation in educational spaces except under terms prescribed by whiteness.

## **Conclusions**

Our analysis documents how whiteness remains an invisible but pervasive form of social differentiation in rural, indigenous-majority areas in southern Chile. The persistence of white privilege, we demonstrate, is built into the organizational space of the school –and the racially constructed connotations of its location – via education policies, architecture, curriculum and institutional relationships (cf. Barajas & Ronnkvist 2006). School teachers and pupils in these contexts are unwilling to recognise racism, instead normalizing pervasive and unacknowledged whiteness which appears to be race-neutral. Hence, these young people come to express the view that although they are folklorized Mapuche, rural, low-status, and academically low-achieving, they are nevertheless (whitened) Chilean subjects. Schooling, then, becomes complicit in simultaneously marking out particular spaces within the

Araucanía region as racially inferior whilst seeming to offer pupils (unequal) participatory opportunities as whitened Chileans.

As in other postcolonial settler society contexts, multicultural educational reforms may perpetuate an implicit association between ‘progress’ and whiteness as by, ‘sidelining culture and difference, uncritical multicultural education perpetuates whiteness and, for Aboriginal [and indigenous] Peoples, constitutes yet another assimilative effort’ (Godlewska et al. 2013:277 on Canada). The Chilean government’s limited multicultural policies driven in part by international indigenous rights movements, led to the introduction of Intercultural Bilingual Education initiatives from 1994 (Richards 2013). Non-governmental (religious) organisations and Mapuche communities independently established forms of schooling outside and beyond these state-led reforms. As this paper demonstrates, in Chile’s rural secondary system, multicultural reforms have not challenged white privileges, in indigenous-majority areas and schools.

Local geographies of dispossession and contestations over territory become impossible to narrativize in the context of secondary schools, despite the majority Mapuche intake and – in the case of a handful of schools – an intercultural bilingual educational programme. In this context, the taken-for-granted privileging of whiteness creates powerful normative concepts which obscure the pervasive influence of racism and instead knit together understandings of choice, progress and modernity into powerful explanatory frameworks. In this sense, socio-economic stratification becomes entangled with processes of racialization that marginalize indigenous knowledges, experiences and young people, while inculcating a dominant narrative of whitening as national belonging and progress. Rural Mapuche youth in the Araucanía Region voice this ambivalent, contradictory and often unrecognised experience, being socialised into a whitened homogeneous norm in which racism profoundly shapes segregation and schooling. Racism, we have demonstrated, is experienced indirectly, as a consequence of being treated according to non-ethnic criteria – on the whole read by pupils as neutral – or folklorized and expressions of a ruined Mapucheness.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> National statistics have until recently been collated according to non-racial criteria, hindering a quantitative analysis of overlapping inequalities (cf. Elacqua 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Other indigenous groups, such as the Aymara, in Chile tend to be omitted altogether from this binary.

<sup>3</sup> Based on 2002 census data.

<sup>4</sup> These concerns frame state initiatives of interculturalism as a form of cultural recognition without economic or political redistributive effects, diverting attention from indigenous communities' unanswered demands for territorial and water rights, political autonomy, and an end to state-sponsored transnational development projects on ancestral lands.

<sup>5</sup> The four schools are ranked 118<sup>th</sup>, 154<sup>th</sup>, 178<sup>th</sup> and 179<sup>th</sup> of 201 in regards to average university entrance test scores.

<sup>6</sup> The national curriculum refers to these differences in more ambiguous terminology: general formation (*formacion general*) and differentiated formation (*formacion diferenciada*).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.junaeb.cl/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/libro\\_junaeb.pdf](http://www.junaeb.cl/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/libro_junaeb.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> In reference to our earlier assertion that education inequalities are concentrated in the most northern and southern regions of Chile, 60 of the 85 schools with 95% or over school population classified as vulnerable are located in regions 1-2 or 9-14.

<sup>9</sup> These narratives closely mirror racialized contexts in northern Canada where aboriginal students are categorised as coming from families with 'social problems' (cf. Van Ingen and Halas 2006).

<sup>10</sup> The textbook dedicates two pages to describe indigenous peoples today, but crucially they omit information between 1883 and 1993.

<sup>11</sup> One of the case study schools performs significantly better than the other three but all have results below the regional average.

<sup>12</sup> Unlike wealthier families (Elacqua 2009), rural indigenous households in the Araucanía make 'choices' on the basis of limited access to information.

<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere we document how a minority of Mapuche secondary pupils view rights organisation interpretations of citizenship, civic belonging and land claims as just and legitimate (Radcliffe & Webb 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, some of these practices are either already incorporated into intercultural bilingual education, and/or comprise components of Mapuche indigenous organisation demands.